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California and the Golden West

15 days from £1,399pp. Departs March to November 2011

There are few places that generate more iconic imagery than California and western USA: the spectacular Grand Canyon; Monument Valley, with its towering sandstone pillars; Yosemite, home to giant sequoia trees; and the snow-capped peaks of the Sierra Nevada. Combine these with the cities of San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego and Las Vegas, and you have a destination that is hard to match.

TRAVEL DIARY

Day 1

Flight to Los Angeles. Afternoon arrival and transfer to the four-star Marriott Hotel for one night.

Day 2

Enjoy a tour of this glamorous city, including Beverly Hills, Sunset Boulevard and Venice Beach. Later, you head to charming San Diego, staying two nights at the three-star Best Western Bayside.

Day 3

San Diego is the classic Californian city, set around a sweeping white-sand bay. After a city tour, you are free to experience San Diego's attractions. Visit the Maritime Museum with its historical ships, including HMS Surprise, a replica of an 18th-century frigate.

Day 4

Drive inland towards Phoenix, passing through the Cleveland National Forest, hugging the US-Mexico border and descending towards the Mojave Desert to stay at the three-star Hampton Inn Glendale-West.

Day 5

Leaving Phoenix, you drive through the Sonora Desert, Oak Creek Canyon and on to the Grand Canyon. Its grandeur is overwhelming: more than a mile deep, with rocks almost as old as the Earth itself, you visit all the best viewing points. Your hotel is the three-star Canyon Plaza hotel.

Day 6

This morning, experience the Grand Canyon's colours in a truly magical display. From the Desert View Watchtower, have your final, lingering look before crossing into the vast Navajo Indian Reservation towards Monument Valley.

Arriving a few hours before sunset, this is the best time to view the flat-topped towers of red sandstone rising dramatically from the surrounding desert.

Tonight, you stay at the three-star Holiday Inn in nearby Kayenta.

Day 7

An early start to see the Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado River. You cross into the Mormon state of Utah and climb to almost 8,000ft, arriving at Bryce Canyon National Park. Created by countless years of erosion, Bryce Canyon presents a spectacular rocky landscape. You stay in the three-star Best Western Ruby's Inn.

Day 8

This morning, you continue to Zion National Park with its massive layers of petrified sand dunes, sheer cliffs and gorges. Late afternoon, you arrive in Las Vegas, staying two nights at the four-star Planet Hollywood Resort, situated in the vibrant heart of the Vegas 'Strip'.

Day 9

Explore the self-styled entertainment capital of the world, a surreal apparition seemingly growing out of the desert, where the world's most renowned sights, including cities such as Venice, Paris, New York – and even the Egyptian Pyramids – have been recreated in incredible detail.

Day 10

You leave Las Vegas, through the barren Mojave Desert, skirting the famous Mojave Air Force Base (landing site for the first Space Shuttle mission), before climbing through the Sierra Nevada.

Suddenly, the climate changes from burning desert to temperate

grassland and forest as you cross the Tehachapi Pass to the plains of the San Joaquin Valley. This evening, you stay at the three-star Shilo Inn just outside Yosemite National Park.

Day 11

This morning, you enter the Park and drive straight through to Yosemite Valley itself, surrounded by sheer cliffs and waterfalls on all sides. You then continue to San Francisco, staying three nights in the superior three-star Sir Francis Drake Hotel on Union Square.

Day 12

From its beginnings as a 19th-century mining boomtown, to the metropolis you see today, San Francisco is simply one of the world's greatest cities.

Nestling on a bay facing the blue Pacific Ocean, and dominated by the Golden Gate Bridge, the city spreads out over

43 steep hills on one side, and a green carpet of forests on the other. Visit Fisherman's Wharf, Nob Hill and Lombard Street.

Day 13

On your final full day, amble through Chinatown, the second largest outside Asia, and wonder at the oriental markets. Perhaps take a stroll to the Ferry Plaza Building or try the once predominantly Italian North Beach, which, during the Fifties, attracted the bohemian writers and artists of the Beatnik movement.

Day 14

Your flight departs late afternoon, so why not do some last-minute shopping – Macy's department store is popular and located very centrally on Union Square.

Day 15

You arrive back in the UK after a very special tour.

Price includes

■ Scheduled direct flights from Heathrow



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- 13 nights' accommodation on room-only basis and four continental breakfasts in three- and four-star hotels
- Stay right in the heart of the Las Vegas 'Strip'
- All tours and entrances to Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, Bryce Canyon, Zion and Yosemite National Parks
- Guided city tours of Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco
- Services of an experienced Riviera tour manager



Huge attractions: top, Yosemite's towering valley walls; above, the massive Golden Gate Bridge



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